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April 18, 2023

BY ECF

Hon. Analisa Torres
Southern District of New York
United States Courthouse
500 Pearl St.
New York, NY 10007-1312

Re: *Rhonda Ambrister et al. v. New York City Department of Education*
22-CV-5516 (AT)

Dear Judge Torres:

I am the Assistant Corporation Counsel assigned to represent Defendant New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) in the above-captioned matter. I write, with the consent of Plaintiffs’ counsel and pursuant to Rule 5.2(d) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, to respectfully request leave to file under seal the certified copy of the administrative record underlying this action, which is brought pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

As an initial matter, the administrative record reflecting the transcripts of the hearings before the Impartial Hearing Office and the State Review Office, as well as exhibits and educational records are replete with confidential information, including the name, date of birth, and other pedigree information of the minor student, R.D., on whose behalf this action is brought. This information should not be made public in compliance with Rule 5.2(a). *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 5.2(a).

Additionally, the record contains information describing R.D.’s medical history and disabilities, as well as the student’s educational progress and history. These materials are confidential under the IDEA and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (defining personally identifiable information under FERPA), § 300.32 (including a “list of personal characteristics or other information that would make it possible to identify the child with reasonable certainty” as personally identifiable information under IDEA).

Moreover, as the underlying administrative proceeding is presumptively closed to the public pursuant to 34 C.F.R. § 300.512(c)(2), all documents recounting the proceeding should themselves be deemed confidential. *Id.* (permitting parents to choose whether a hearing is open or closed to the public). “For these reasons, courts in this Circuit have routinely allowed administrative records underlying IDEA cases to be filed under seal to protect the privacy interests of minor child plaintiffs.” *L.B. v. New York City Dept of Ed*, 15-CV-3176, 2015 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 127081, *2 (S.D.N.Y. Sept. 22, 2015)(citing *A.M. ex rel. Y.N. v. New York City Dep't of Educ.*, 964 F. Supp. 2d 270, 277 (S.D.N.Y. 2013); (*C.L. v. Scarsdale Union Free Sch. Dist.*, 913 F. Supp. 2d 26, 30 (S.D.N.Y. 2012)).

For the reasons above, Defendant believes that the administrative record is appropriately filed under seal pursuant to *Lugosch v. Pyramid Co. of Onondaga*, 435 F.3d 110, 120 (2d Cir. 2006) (noting that countervailing factors weighing in favor of sealing include, *inter alia*, the privacy interests of those resisting disclosure). In particular, Defendant submits that the *Lugosch* standard is met because protecting R.D.’s privacy interests in keeping confidential the minor student’s education and medical history constitutes a “compelling reason” to seal the record outweighs the public’s interest in access. *Lugosch*, 435 F.3d at 121.

Accordingly, Defendant respectfully requests, with consent of Plaintiffs’ counsel, leave to file the certified administrative record in this action under seal.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Kendra Elise Riddleberger

Kendra Elise Riddleberger
Assistant Corporation Counsel

GRANTED. The Court concludes that Defendant has met its burden to demonstrate that the interests in filing the administrative record, ECF No. 35, under seal outweigh the presumption of public access under *Lugosch v. Pyramid Co. of Onondaga*, 435 F.3d 110 (2d Cir. 2006).

SO ORDERED.

Dated: April 19, 2023
New York, New York



ANALISA TORRES
United States District Judge